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**Economic, social and embodied cultural capitals as shapers and predictors of boys' educational aspirations**

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# **Economic, social and embodied cultural capital as shapers and predictors of boys' educational aspirations**

The paper presents the result of a quantitative survey as a part of a larger mixed-method study conducted across two case study schools in urban Jamaica. It focuses on Black Caribbean boys' levels of educational aspirations in relation to their economic, social and embodied cultural capital. The study utilises Bourdieu's notions of 'capital', reconceptualised to match the socio-cultural context of the research and set within a critical realist meta-theoretical framework. Logistic regression models, supported by participants' narratives, show boys' educational aspirations to be highly predictable by their level of capital - including dispositional beliefs held through influence of the maternal family both locally and in the Jamaican diaspora of the UK, USA and Canada.

Keywords: educational aspirations; capital; logistic regression; critical realism; Jamaica

## **Introduction**

The educational aspirations (EA) of Black Caribbean (BC) boys' is a major topic of interest in educational research and policy debates in countries with large Caribbean Diasporas like the UK, USA and Canada (Goodman et al., 2011, Strand and Winston, 2008a, CabinetOffice, 2008, Tikly et al., 2006, Saxon et al., 2012, Hayes et al., 2012, Cummins, 1997). Research identifies this group as underachieving educationally and attributes this to being disadvantaged based on a range of issues; including low socio-economic background (SES), ethnicity and gender which impacts on their aspirations towards higher education (HE) and actual educational achievements. Significantly, this topic is of foremost importance to Caribbean countries like Jamaica where this problem pervades but with a different focus. The Jamaican literature focuses more on social-class and gender versus ethnicity as Black Jamaicans make up approximately 92% of the population. In addition, the literature centres on boys' academic under-participation and underrepresentation versus underachievement; this is attributed to the view that Black boys in Jamaica are actually advantaged as the dominant group and by their gender (Figueroa, 2000, Brown and Chevannes, 1998, Parry,

1996). Underachievement in this context, refers to boys' level of success on their final Caribbean Council examinations (CXC); a standardized one across the English Speaking Caribbean which is taken at the end of high school and seen as a measure of students' future success in terms of access to HE (Evans, 2000; USAID, 2005). Boys are said to underachieve by scoring much lower than girls on these exams. On the other hand, under-participation is defined in terms of boys' lower enrolment, lower attendance rates and higher dropouts at mid to upper level of secondary schooling (Chevannes, 2002; Chevannes, 2005). Underrepresentation refers to the high ratio of girls to boys in HE. According to UNESCO (EFA, 2009), these boys are outnumbered in HE as much as two to one in favour of girls. For many Jamaican sociologists, historians and policy makers, boys' underachievement and under-participation leads to their underrepresentation (Stockfelt, 2013, GOJ, 2009, EFA, 2009, USAID, 2005, Chevannes, 2005, Bailey, 2003, Figueroa, 2000). Chevannes, a prominent Jamaican educator and sociologist, hypothesised that BC boys' underrepresentation has a lot to do with their low desire for HE, that is, low educational aspirations (Chevannes 2005; Stockfelt 2013).

This paper aims to fill a gap in the literature about BC (specifically Black-Jamaican) boys' under-participation at the secondary level of schooling (K-16) and underrepresentation in HE in relation to their EA. This area of research is quite popular in the educational literature with respect to higher income countries like the USA and UK. However, such focus is limited in the Caribbean context (specifically Jamaica), where much research tend to focus on achievement without a critical exploration of the personal agencies of these boys' within their cultural/sub-cultural contexts. The paper explores the nature of boys' aspirations to schooling and HE (EA) in a detailed quantitative survey, providing a glimpse into their agencies in a different cultural context. The survey is rooted in an in-depth one-year ethnographic qualitative study which explored the nature of BC boys' EA across two schools

in urban Jamaica (Stockfelt, 2013). It offers a unique approach to understanding BC boys' under-participation and under-representation by examining the level of their EA in relation to their level of capital existing within their educational field in the Caribbean context. Such insights are critical for countries like the UK in the Jamaican diaspora where the literature details problems with BC boys' lower enrolment rates at the university level and lower overall educational outcomes (Strand, 2011, Goodman et al., 2011, Strand and Winston, 2008b, Gutman and Akerman, 2008, Saxon et al., 2012, Berzin, 2010, Jha and Kelleher, 2006).

The diasporas exist as very different contexts from Jamaica; however, they share an intricate space through remittance, continuous migration/emigration, organised diaspora institutions and shared cultural/dispositional beliefs (Stockfelt, 2013, Jamaica-Observer, 2004). Capital is used here in reference to Bourdieu's theory of practice and includes a reconceptualised version of social, economic and embodied cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1986). These reconceptualised terms emerged from the ethnographic research which guided the themes explored in this paper. Overall, the findings reinforced existing research about the negative impact of social-class and categorising pupils' based on perceived 'ability' during their secondary years of schooling (K-16 education), and the impact this has on possible educational outcomes. Uniquely it flags the importance of the diasporas in potentially offsetting these disadvantages and boosting boys' EA.

## **Background**

The Jamaican literature, feature boys' underrepresentation (much lower percentage of males in relation to females) in HE from a variety of perspectives: historical, sociological and educational. Historically, education in Jamaica has its roots in slavery and was intended solely to support small elites of Whites and a large Black labour/working class (MOEYC,

2004). Post-emancipation education in Jamaica was developed with the purpose of integrating ex-slaves into a colonial economy established to maintain an unchallenging lower class of workers; this continued into the twentieth century to trained Black boys and girls to maintain their station in life to reduce high aspirations (Hamilton, 1997, Morrison and Milner, 1995, Whiteman, 1994). The historians view Black-male masculinity as being hegemonised through emasculation due to slavery (Beckles, 1996, Parry, 1996). This historical dimension contributed to a foundation for greater distinction of gender roles based on male power in the Caribbean with behaviours perceived as ‘feminine’ rejected by the Black male, which in some instances, include traditional formalised education (Chevannes, 2002, Figueroa, 2000). However, more recent trends in the literature suggest a merging consensus from policy makers, sociologists and educational researchers that boys underachievement in secondary schools and underrepresentation in HE is based on a complex intermix of socio-economic and cultural factors. Specifically, high unemployment and poverty rates, with many boys from low socio-economic backgrounds more attracted to crime as a means of economic survival and not HE (GOJ, 2009; Stockfelt, 2013; UNODC, 2007).

In 2005, the Jamaica Constabulary Force reported that Jamaica had a murder rate of 56 per 100,000 residents, one of the highest in the world (UNODC, 2007). Crime and violence is seen as a social problem affecting mainly young men (under 30) from low socio-economic backgrounds (GOJ 2009). According to the Jamaican government, boys’ tend to drop out of the school system from year nine and join dangerous gangs in the inner-cities; this is of crucial concern as education is seen as a means of reducing crime and poverty and boosting the struggling economy (GOJ, 2009). In addition, boys on average tend to be absent from school more often and for longer periods, this results in overall lower enrolment, lower attendance rates and higher dropouts at mid to upper level of secondary schooling (Chevannes, 2002, Chevannes, 2005, Stockfelt, 2013, USAID, 2005, MOEYC, 2004, Bailey,

2003). Chevannes (1999, 2002), explained the reason for boys underrepresentation in HE in relation to their personal agencies based on their socio-economic and cultural situation; in that, boys under-participate in secondary schools and choose not to move into HE because of lower EA. Such an explanation is supported by more recent research that show boys' EA as being linked with a rational assessment of opportunities and constraints based on Jamaica's economic situation (Stockfelt, 2013, Chevannes, 2005, Saxon et al., 2012b, Hayes et al., 2012, CCYD, 2010). BC boys in the diasporas and Jamaica exist in different contexts, however, they share strong historical (slavery and colonialism) and modern (remittance and immigration/migration) links. Jamaica's relationship with its diasporas is reflected in the economic support which flow from family to family/community accounting for more GDP than tourism and bauxite, Jamaica's two main means of livelihood (CIA, 2013, McLean, 2008).

### ***Theoretical Framework***

The paper is grounded in Bhaskar's Critical realist (CR) philosophical framework which was used as a guide to inform the way the research was conducted (Bhaskar and Danermark, 2006, Bhaskar, 1997). CR encourages research to engage with other theoretical viewpoints and methodologies to gain different versions of the same reality (plural ontologies). In this manner, the research was conducted in two distinct phases using different methodologies (an ethnographic research and a survey design), methods (interviews, observations/participant observation, and questionnaire) and analysis (personal/reflective, trends, correlation and predictions). This included utilising a Bourdieun viewpoint – along with the raw narratives from the participants and experiences/cultural insights from the researcher - to discuss notions of aspirations by exploring the relationship between structures and agencies; through a reconceptualised version of capital (see below) (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). Bourdieu

(1977) defines capital as sources of advantages that provide the basis for class differences. Within the study context, three forms of capital (economic, social and embodied cultural) were operationalised based on findings from a one-year ethnographic study. These concepts were defined in relation to factors flagged as advantaging or disadvantaging boys by how they were positioned within their educational field (space or setting). Their educational field is the space created by their homes, school and communities through which they experience education/schooling. Capital were operationalised as follows: socio-economic status (SES) - economic; type of school, performance streams – social; beliefs about the value of schooling and HE – cultural (the embodied state) (see Data analysis and Discussion section for further details).

### ***Methodology***

The research was based on a taxonomy developmental mixed-method model; beginning with an initial qualitative phase and ending with a quantitative one (Creswell & Clark, 2007; Tashakkori & Teddle, 2003). The qualitative study was the ethnographic research previously mentioned which served to ground the research and identify an emerging understanding of boys' EA within their context. The quantitative study is the basis of this current paper, and serves to explain the connection between factors initially identified as limiting or boosting these boys' EA.

### ***Population***

The research was conducted across two secondary schools in urban Jamaica; a newly upgraded (comprehensive school – School A) and a traditional (School B) school. Traditional grammar generally host pupils with the highest passes from a standardised Grade Six Achievement test (GSAT) taken at the end of primary school; while those with lower passes usually attend the newly-upgraded. School A represented an extreme example of a newly-



upgraded school, hosting pupils with lower passes from the GSAT exams. In addition, it existed within a catchment area characterised by high crime rate, unemployment and poverty, i.e., a garrison community. School A still produced pupils with good examination grades who had progressed into HE; though mainly girls. On the other hand, School B represented a very high achieving school with many pupils (boys and girls) achieving good A-C grades and progressing into HE. The catchment area for School B reflected more variety with respect to SES backgrounds than School A. However, even at this school, the achievement rate - assessed by the CXC examinations - for girls was still higher than boys.

### *Survey*

The survey was based on a questionnaire with seven sections. These sections represented themes identified from the ethnographic study as well as the literature. These themes were flagged as factors impacting on boys' aspirations to higher education (HE) across the two schools (Stockfelt, 2011, 2013) and within the literature about the nature of aspirations (Strand, 2011, Goodman et al., 2011, Strand and Winston, 2008b, Gutman and Akerman, 2008, Saxon et al., 2012, Berzin, 2010, Jha and Kelleher, 2006).

Section 1: This section gathered information about these boys' social (type of school, performance streams) and economic (SES, type of community) capital. SES was measured based on the following five characteristics:

1. Occupation of the mother (item 4): The majority of children in Jamaica live with their mothers and extended families. Unlike higher income countries, knowing the occupation of mothers contribute significantly to knowing a child's SES status as it usually indicates income levels and educational backgrounds.
2. Occupation of fathers (item 5): This is usually one of the standard criteria for measuring SES (Steve Strand & Joe Winston, 2008). However, 334 participants identified their

mother as the main member of their household, as opposed to 173 participants identifying their father (in most cases, this number also includes participants who also lived with their mothers). Knowing the occupation of the fathers aided in identifying income and educational backgrounds; however, knowing the occupation of their mothers seemed more pertinent as a relatively significant number did not know who their fathers were.

3. Who they lived with (item 6): Large, extended families led by single mothers with many young children usually belong to the lower SES categories in Jamaica, especially if they reside in the inner-cities (item 8).
4. Number of participants in one household (item 7): Sometimes many participants in one household could mean higher income in a lower income country. However, within the overcrowded urban spaces of the inner-cities of the capital, this is not the case, so usually the larger the number of participants in one household in the inner-city, the lower the SES background.
5. Location of their community (item 8): this is similar to the postal code system in the UK or USA but based more on qualitative knowledge and experience of community location and poverty; especially in Kingston and parts of St. Andrew and St. Catherine.

These items were ‘summarised’ qualitatively for each participant to give a measure of SES: low, low-medium and medium. These three categories were more reflective of the background of these pupils where subtle differences like having a parent earning money in the diasporas, changed their experiential economic situation. In addition, there were no high SES category amongst the participants.

Section two: This section measured boys’ aspirations as ‘high’ or ‘low’ based on their desires/intentions towards HE in response to four items (9-12):

I want and intend to go to university after secondary school.

I want and intend to learn a trade instead of going to university.

I want and intend to start a small business instead of going to university.

What level of qualification do you want and intend to get at the end of your education?

The first three items were measured on a binary ‘yes’ or ‘no’ scale, while the fourth item was open-ended and then coded in response to HE. A measure of ‘high’ or ‘low’ EA was taken with respect to going into HE or not.

Section 3-6: This section collected data about these boys’ experiences with/about schooling and HE in relation to primary and secondary sources of influence; i.e., families, communities, schools, diaspora and peer groups. These represented structures within their educational space that were identified during the qualitative study, as influencing their EA. The items focussed on participants’ measure of beliefs about these groups’ efficacy beliefs in their ability to be successful if they aspired educationally. For example, item 16 stated:

My family talks to me about learning a trade instead of going to university after secondary school

Section 7: This section consists of a cluster of propositions that overlapped with sections three to six but was specific to held cultural, personal and efficacious beliefs about the significance of education from the narratives in the qualitative study; for example, item 36 stated:

Jamaica has no jobs, so it is better to start a small business after high school than waste money and go to university.

Items in sections 3-7 were measured on a four-point semantic differential Likert scale, from strongly agree to strongly disagree (Sclove, 2001). This was done purposely to solicit a response from the participants. Reliability and validity tests were done on the questionnaire through comparative literature review; grounding the questionnaire in a qualitative study; piloting; exploratory factor analysis and a Cronbach alpha test to check the reliability of the factor scores (see data analysis section for results). The questionnaire covered a range of themes specific to the context but also reflective within the literature on BC boys’ EA.

The survey was conducted over a 10 week period where the questionnaire was issued to 420 boys across School A and B. Each school had five grades (year groups), and four to seven performance streams. Performance streams represent ability groups across grades eight (age 12/13) to eleven (age 16/17) based on pupils' performance on end-of-year tests. Ten boys were issued a questionnaire from each stream across years eight to eleven based on a stratified random selection. This means that all boys name from each stream (highest to lowest ability), from each grade (age 12/13 to 16/17), were placed separately in a bag and ten names drawn. This was to ensure that each grade (age group) and performance stream were represented. The names from each stream were further collapsed into three composite groups - per grade - based on the advice of the grade-supervisors who thought three streams were more representative of the ability level across the grades versus six or seven. In addition, this increased the number of participants in each category to facilitate more effective statistical analysis.

### *Data Analysis*

Two statistical tests – chi-square and logistic regression - were conducted on the data to ascertain the relationship between these boys' capital (economic - SES, social - performance streams and type of school, embodied cultural - beliefs about the value of HE) and their level of EA. Pearson chi-square was conducted separately between type of school, performance stream and SES to ascertain if these factors were associated with or independent of EA (see result section). A logistic regression was done for deeper multivariate analysis of the data to explore the feasibility of identifying a statistically significant model for these boys' EA in relation to the factors operationalised as 'capital'. Embodied cultural capital was operationalised as beliefs about the value of schooling and HE and explored in section seven on the questionnaire; this was reduced to six main factors/themes using factor analysis in

SPSS. These factors were (Stockfelt, 2011):

- positive dispositional beliefs towards HE (1);
- negative dispositional beliefs towards HE (2);
- influence of social structures 1 (family, school, community, including friendship groups) and inclination towards practical/further vs. higher education (3);
- influence of social structures 2 & positive narratives from school, community and peers (4);
- influence of social structures 3 & positive narratives from family (including the diaspora) and positive experience with school and community re higher education (5);
- and (negative) influence of social structure 4 & negative experience, narratives and observations about HE (6).

A Cronbach Alpha test was used to evaluate the reliability of the scales based on these six factor scores. The main purpose was to check for internal consistency, i.e., how well the items on each scale were connected. After mild modification, the results showed that the factors had good construct validity and internal reliability (Cronbach Alpha >0.7) (Stockfelt, 2011). Multiple regression and correlation tests were done using these six factors to check for inter-correlation and multicollinearity. The results showed no evidence of this, with low correlation between the belief factors. These factors were fitted in a logistic regression model, along with SES, performance stream and school type as predictors, with EA as the dependent variable (see results section). This was done to ascertain the extent to which these capital ‘explained’ or predicted levels of EA.

## **Findings**

Descriptive statistics showed that 81.6% (177) of all boys at School B had high EA as opposed to 49.8% (101) at School A. This was significant in relation to SES as only 28.6% of boys at School B belonged to the low SES category (of which 66.1% had high EA) versus a high 57% at School A (of which only 28.6% had high EA). Descriptive statistics for performance streams showed a similar pattern, i.e., those in the higher ‘ability’ groups had

higher EA. This was supported by the chi-square results which showed EA as having a highly significant ( $p < 0.001$ ), positive correlation with all three factors as shown in Table 1 below:

*Table 1: Descriptive correlation*

Quite significantly, SES, had the strongest relationship, followed by performance stream. In other words, the boys from the higher SES groups, performance streams and status school (School B) had statistically significant higher EA than in the lower ones.

The logistic regression model with all the predictor variables (SES, performance stream, type of school and six belief factors from the factor analysis) was highly significant with  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 26$ ,  $n = 420$ ) = 244.5,  $p < 0.001$ . The Homer-Lemeshow test was also non-significant with a result of  $\chi^2$  ( $df = 8$ ,  $n = 420$ ) = 6.45,  $p = 0.597$ . According to Pallant (2010), this test is cited as the most reliable for model fit available in SPSS. The result shows that there was no significant difference between the observed model and the predicted one. The model represented a large percentage of the variance (61.1%) and correctly classified 83.1% of the cases. The model was better able to predict high EA (90.6%) than low EA (68.3%).

With logistic regression, one level from each category of each variable is selected as a baseline from which the other levels are compared. In this case, based on the four scales presented for each predictor variables, the first category which was the lowest one was automatically chosen as the baseline in SPSS. The result showed that all predictor variables made a statistically unique contribution to levels of EA. SES made the strongest overall contribution, followed by influence-of-social-structure-3 (belief based on positive influence from the maternal family – including the diaspora) with odds ratios of 16.02 and 15.04 respectively. This meant that participants from medium SES backgrounds (highest in the dataset) were 16 times more likely to have high EA than participants in the low SES category

(baseline category); and participants with strong influence from their maternal family (locally/diasporas), were 15 times more likely to have high EA than those experiencing low influence (and no family in the diaspora). To check the reliability of the overall model, the residuals were examined in the case list, showing 14 outliers which were removed and the analysis rerun. The resulting model was a better fit to the data, i.e., still highly significant ( $df=26$ ,  $n=406$ ,  $\chi^2=301.33$ ,  $p<0.001$ ) with a non-significant Hosmer-Lemeshow test ( $df=8$ ,  $n=406$ ,  $\chi^2=7.433$ ,  $p=0.49$ ) and higher level of predictability (73.2% of the variance and classifying 86.7% of the cases correctly). Specifically, the predictive ability of the model with respect to low EA was improved, moving from predicting 68.3% to 75.6% of the cases correctly. Table 2 shows the output for the variables in the equation.

*Table 2: Variables in the Equation*

This final model showed higher odds ratios; with positive dispositional beliefs from narratives of family locally and in the diaspora (influence-of-social-structure-3) having the strongest predictive ability with an odds ratio of 135.30, followed by SES with 94.13. However, a note of caution; to aid in interpreting this change in the two highest predictor variables, it is important to note that 10 of the 14 cases that were removed were from School A. SES had the strongest association with level of EA at School A (0.71) than School B (0.66), while influence-of-social-structure-3 had a much weaker association (0.287) at School A than at School B (0.641). Therefore, removing these cases will increase the predictive ability of influence-of-social-structure-3 at the expense of SES.

## **Discussion**

The survey result showed highly significant and relatively strong relationships between possible educational outcomes and capital created by structures within our educational field.

K-16 education (primary and secondary level of education) occurs during a critical developmental phase where pupils tend to adjust their aspirations with respect to perceived opportunities and barriers (Gottfredson, 2002). Within the Jamaican context, secondary education usually occurs between ages 11 and 17, which Gottfredson (2002) theorised as circumscription and compromise. This is the stage when they adjust their true aspirations to more realistic ones; i.e., based on experiences/beliefs in relation to their level/s of capital created by structures in the Jamaican society and their educational field. Type of school (traditional grammar vs comprehensive) and performance streams (higher ability vs lower ability groups as created by schools) represent social capital based on boys' experiences of being advantaged or disadvantaged by the nature of their group affiliation. As shown in the findings, attending a traditional high school or being a member of a higher performing stream was related to having high EA; while attending the newly upgraded school and being a member of the lower performing streams were related to low EA.

According to Bourdieu & Wacquant (1992: 119):

Social capital is the sum of the resources, actual or virtual, that accrue to an individual or a group by virtue of possessing a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition.

It is these 'institutionalized relationships' from group affiliation that amounts to boys' experiences of feeling and being advantaged/disadvantaged. In Jamaica, attending a traditional high school and/or being a member of a high performing stream becomes a source of benefit or 'credential' from being evaluated as more capable/intelligent with a greater probability of success in the future (Bourdieu, 1986). This is constantly reinforced by the strong demarcation in the CXC examination results across these types of schools; with mainly pupils from traditional schools receiving higher passes and the coveted five A-C grades seen as a standard for future success (Bailey, 2003). This is also reflected in the matriculation rates, with the University of the West Indies (UWI) - which prides itself as the



Ivy League university of the Caribbean – having mainly students from traditional high school being enrolled (UWI, 2011). Positions of leadership within the Jamaican society are often held by those with this academic background. It is not possible to say – without further research - that pupils from comprehensive schools and in lower performing streams are discriminated against, however their membership serves to disadvantage their progress into HE through their experiences and the impact it has on them and their aspirations – with boys’ from lower SES background being typically overrepresented in this group. This finding was flagged over a decade ago by Evans (2000) who identified a strong link between types of school, streaming and overall educational achievement within the Jamaican context. Today the problem remains as schools continue the practice of streaming, theoretically categorising these boys as ‘in’ or ‘out’ based on their group affiliation.

According to Bourdieu (1986), both social and cultural capital are eventually convertible to economic capital. Unlike social capital given to these boys by the education system based on the nature of their test scores, SES is accrued from their family as a primary structure. This means that participants have been socialised in relation to their level of capital from early in their development, prior to entering the education system. The results showed an overrepresentation of boys in the lower SES groups at the lower status school and performance streams than the higher ones. With the other factors being held constant, boys from medium (highest in the dataset) SES backgrounds were much more likely to aspire towards HE than those from low SES backgrounds. Boys from lower SES backgrounds are positioned at a disadvantage through their limited experience of education within the formal school system. Most participants from these backgrounds within this study resided in either urban or semi-rural garrison areas. A garrison community describes an overpopulated inner-city area characterised by gang violence, high unemployment/crime/murder rates and is usually patrolled constantly by police/army officers in an attempt to reduce the

crime/violence. Many of these boys' parents were unemployed and depended on the informal sector to hustle and/or remittance from partners and/or relatives abroad. In Jamaica, education is maintained through a cost-sharing scheme between the parents and the government, so getting access to certain facilities are limited for many on low-income. Some of these boys join family members after school to work and generate extra money to help finance the household; reducing the time spent on academic activities. Overall, these boys are disadvantaged based on limited economic capital which dictates where they live, their educational experiences and indirectly their EA. This supports the finding in the international literature, where SES was found to be linked to educational aspirations across different contexts (Hayes et al., 2012, Byun et al., 2012, Strand, 2011, Stockfelt, 2011, Goodman et al., 2011, Berzin, 2010, Strand and Winston, 2008a, Lupton and Kintrea, 2008, Gutman and Akerman, 2008, Tikly et al., 2006, Jha and Kelleher, 2006, Stockfelt, 2013).

In line with a critical realism (CR) philosophical understanding, it is challenging to isolate the impact of these factors as level of EA seems to emerge in relation to a dynamic interplay between factors within these boys' educational field; i.e., their social capital arising from their school understood as a structure and their economic capital based on their family as a structure (Bhaskar, 1997, Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992). However, when discussing 'beliefs', it is important to also include an element of personal agency. As Gottfredson (2002) outlined in her theory, children tend to eventually aspire in relation to their beliefs about opportunities or constraints in their environment. In this research, boys' dispositional beliefs about the value of schooling and HE is seen as impacting on their levels of EA. Dispositional beliefs refer to developing beliefs about education, which has become ingrained through primary and secondary socialization (Bourdieu & Wacquant, 1992). These beliefs – represented by the six factors from the factor analysis - become habituated through identification, experiences and narratives about schooling and HE from structures within their

educational field. Social structures constitute primary (ex – family) and secondary (school, diaspora, community) sources of influence. According to Bourdieu (1986) cultural capital, exist in three forms: embodied, institutionalised and objectified. The embodied state is a form of habituated beliefs that impacts on outcome behaviour, like aspirations to HE. These six factors represent an aggregation of held beliefs under two overarching themes: HE and schooling as important for altruistic reasons and for economic independence in the future; or as a waste of time as it presents little/no benefits to the present/future. Such values and beliefs were reflected to some extent in the shared ‘class habitus’ about the value of education in the local context and the diasporas.

Class habitus as defined by Bourdieu (1977) consists of common traits across a particular group based on the similarities in their dispositions and on shared experiences in relation to their social class. It is not feasible to say that boys from similar SES groupings had the same disposition or shared the same experiences; however, the trend in the dataset supported by the ethnographic study (Stockfelt, 2011) connects with the thesis that certain members of the same class would have been confronted with similar situations in relation to their level of capital within their educational field. This affects the common habitus through shared experiences determined by their SES during primary and secondary socialisation. For example, boys from certain low SES backgrounds in this study tended to be raised in single parent households, lived in garrison communities, were usually placed in the lower performing streams, with a commonality of experience about/towards schooling and HE. Bourdieu (1977) suggested that to define the relationship between class habitus and the individual, one has to explore the:

‘... homology of diversity within homogeneity reflecting the diversity within homogeneity characteristics of their social conditions of production, that the singular habitus of the different members of the same class are united’ (p. 86).

Homology can be defined as a process where human beliefs are shared historically through a common ancestor. Taken within the context of the research, this suggests that embodied culturally held beliefs about and towards HE within the relevant structures of these boys' educational field was diverse; but had a common denominator which could be ascertained to understand the level of their EA. This common denominator refers to their shared experience in relation to their social positions and their level of economic capital within their educational field. For example most boys from low SES backgrounds and the lower status school responded 'strongly disagreed-disagreed' to the following propositions on the questionnaire:

People from my family go to university after they leave secondary school.

I want to go to university because I see other people in my community succeeding when they go to university.

Their responses were quite similar across various propositions about their beliefs in the value of HE within the Jamaican context, for example

Education in Jamaica is a waste of time... does not make money in Jamaica.

Such propositions incorporated their experiences of HE which most agreed were important, but redundant for someone with low social-economic capital. Such beliefs were attributed to narratives of agents and social groups - parents, teachers, peers and important community members - within the structures of their educational field. These boys are therefore competing for the 'opportunity' of HE from unequal positions based on their beliefs about/towards HE. In this manner, their beliefs become a form of cultural capital within their educational field, endowed to them by narratives from their social groupings and structures, and impacting on or guiding their intentions and desires. The level of these boys' EA is therefore based on personal agencies in relation to their dispositional beliefs about/towards HE, as well as the role of education as experienced and observed throughout the process of their primary and secondary socialization. However this agency is limited by their social and economic capital which shapes their level of EA (Bourdieu, 1977).

The diasporas seem to exist as an outlier with the potential to re-position these boys by increasing their embodied cultural capital and in some cases their economic – through remittances. The potential of the diaspora presented itself directly through what was operationalised as ‘*deferred high educational aspirations*’, a phenomenon where boys who had low EA and high aspiration towards economic success, also had high EA if migrating to the diasporas became a possibility (Stockfelt, 2013). The modified logistic regression model showed influence-of-social-structure-3 followed by SES has being the strongest predictors of EA. Influence-of-social-structure-3 represents combined propositions depicting positive dispositional beliefs from narratives of maternal family locally and in the diaspora. The influence of the diaspora in boosting EA presented itself as one of the most critical aspects of the finding in relation to this belief factor. Item 46 (*I am working hard in school so I can study at university in America, Canada or England where there are better opportunities*) on the questionnaire evaluated pupils’ desires and intentions toward HE in relation to the Jamaican diaspora. The descriptive statistics showed that even boys with little/no intention to stay on in HE from either school, agreed or strongly agreed to this item. Follow-up informal discussion with some of these pupils and their teachers showed high aspirations for HE in the diasporas based on a belief that such education is transferable to economic capital later in life. This was attributed to the level of success achieved by family/community members who migrated to such countries. Many of these boys believed that having the same education in Jamaica would not offer the same level of opportunities because of the struggling economy and the high unemployment levels.

### ***Implications***

In relation to the findings, schools need to rethink the policy of streaming pupil’s according to perceived abilities and focus on ‘mixed-ability’ classes which many studies have

highlighted as having a positive impact on pupil's experience of learning (including the primary level) (Boaler, 2008, Duflo et al, 2011, EEF, 2014). This could involve extra and 'special' classes for children who are gifted and those with learning disabilities to provide more support alongside the mainstream ones. In addition, more effort is needed within the school system to link education and schooling with practical opportunities for the future. For example: exposing boys to other possibilities or success stories of HE outside of what they have experienced within their communities. This should target more pupils' from disadvantaged backgrounds to expose them to the possibilities that higher (and further – including trade/skills) education may provide. This involves a more open-ended view of 'ability' that is not reduced to a standardised test and greater incorporation of the wider family unit within the teaching/learning process; for example, the role of the diaspora – an area of limited research to-date - in engaging and promoting more positive values about HE and schooling.

The potential of the diasporas could be utilised through empowerment seminars with pupils, parents, teachers, education stakeholders and representatives from the diasporas aimed at building on the narratives of the positive value of education. Jamaica's diaspora population is estimated at 2.5 million – including Jamaican descents – putting the global population at over 5 million (Jamaica local population is estimated at 2.7 million). The value of Jamaica to its diaspora is already being utilised by projects like Sewell's (2002) 'Generating Genius', aimed at mentoring Black-Caribbean (mainly Jamaican) boys to boost their EA and representation at exemplary HE institutions within the UK. This involves sending targeted underachieving Black-British (Jamaican background) boys' back to Jamaica for selected periods to create a dual effect in a bid to raise the aspirations of these boys as well the local ones involved in the program. Outside of the boost to the economic capital provided by the diaspora through remittances, the strength of the impact of the narratives from the diaspora is

quite strong and may be utilised based on research on a much larger scale. This is an area of potential further research that may be critical for boosting aspirations both in the Caribbean and the diaspora contexts.

## **Conclusion**

The paper presented findings from a quantitative survey based on a mixed-method study to identify the level of boys' educational aspirations (EA) in relation to their under-representation in HE in Jamaica. It utilised a Bhaskarian critical realist (CR) philosophical approach supported by a reconceptualised view of Bourdieu's 'capital' to explore the relationship between level of EA and type of school/performance stream/socio-economic status/beliefs about the value of HE (operationalised as capital). Chi-square and logistic regression tests conducted in SPSS showed these factors as either boosting or reducing boys' EA in relation to the status or experience it offers them within their educational field. The overall study was exploratory in nature and so the findings served to inform a gap in the existing literature on aspiration both within the local context where this is a relatively new area, and the international one, to add a fresh perspective in a different cultural context. This implies the importance of researching EA within context as the international literature does not reflect specific aspects of the field in which it is being investigated. For example, identifying the role of the diasporas added to contextual understanding that was non-existent within the literature on aspirations which focuses mainly on the role of the family and culture within local contexts. Overall, the findings indicated that aspirations are contextual, dynamic and malleable in relation to pupils' educational structure and settings.

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